

Chapter 12

Intergenerational Trauma and Other Unique Challenges as Barriers to Native American Educational Success

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines unique challenges in the way of Native American educational success as well as solutions to overcoming. The chapter addresses why intergenerational trauma matters, the impacts of public policy on Native American people such as the Native American Languages Act of 1990, and the importance of Native American people being connected to the land, protecting traditions, language, and their ancestors. The purpose of this literature review is to shed light on Native American educational barriers and to critique existing literature. Areas analyzed include the trend of low rates of educational attainment among Native Americans, the history of abuse towards Indigenous people and other minorities, the impact on individuals, and solutions for the future. There is a need for Native American students to stay connected to cultural tradition, cultural relevancy in education, role models for Native American people, and an importance of Native American students staying connected to family.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the results of a literature review of more than 60 journal articles and books with a focus on unique challenges stunting Native American educational success. In synthesizing different themes found in the literature on the current state of Native American education, the author explores the history, context, historical trauma and abuse experienced by Indigenous peoples and minority groups while pursuing an education (Adams, 1995; Anderson, n.d.; Blackhawk, 1995; Boyer, 1997; Harmon, 2010; Lawrence, 2000; Lewis & McLester, 2005; Mello & Wolf, 2010; Pacheco et al., 2013; Powers, 1932; Torpy, 2000). Subsequently, the chapter also offers solutions for overcoming educational obstacles

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for Native Americans based on best practices from ethnic groups around the world and will discuss the necessity for Native Americans to remain immersed in cultural values to ensure educational success (Coladarci, 1983; Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Kanu, 2006; Tierney, 1992).

The purpose of this literature review is to shed light on Native American educational barriers and to critique existing literature. As a clarification of terms, the label of Native American will be used interchangeably with American Indian, Indian, Indigenous, Aboriginal, First Nations, and Native depending on how it was used by researchers in the literature. This chapter highlights the trend of low rates of educational attainment among Native Americans, the history of abuse towards Indigenous people and other minorities, the impact on individuals, and solutions for the future.

Within the overarching theme of a history of abuse in the Native American community, this literature review will discuss the prominent subthemes of perceptions of bias in history towards Native Americans (Blackhawk, 1995; Powers, 1932; Tierney, 1992), researchers misleading Native Americans through harmful studies that take place against Indigenous people (Harmon, 2010; Lawrence, 2000; Mello & Wolf, 2010; Pacheco et al., 2013; Torpy, 2000), and the traumatic impact of the forced boarding school system in the early 20th century (Adams, 1995; Anderson, n.d.; Boyer, 1997; Lewis & McLester, 2005). Finally, this literature review will synthesize best practices from around the world in battling historical trauma and the importance of Native Americans preserving their cultural traditions while striving for educational success. Three subthemes emerge in Native Americans staying connected to cultural tradition for educational success: the value of cultural relevance in the curriculum (Coladarci, 1983; Covarrubias, Fryberg, 2015; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Kanu, 2006; Tierney, 1992), the importance of Native American role models (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008), and the significance of family (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Tierney, 1992).

A brief introduction and context for framing unique challenges in the way of Native American educational success is followed by an examination of current western educational attainment rates of Native American students, then the unique challenges to Native American students pursuing a western education is considered. The history of abuse, deception and discrimination to Native American people in research and the impact to individuals and communities with potential solutions to unique challenges in the way of Native American educational success followed by a conclusion and summary. The objective of this chapter is to identify unique challenges in the way of Native American educational success and to provide solutions for overcoming those challenges.

BACKGROUND

Native American people's connection to land, spirit, their ancestors, and our Creator is at the very core of understanding this chapter and in understanding the unique obstacles in the way of Native American people receiving a western education. A person should not separate the past from having relevance to Native American people, as for many Native American people the concept of seven generations is a notion in which all of our actions are to be done with recognition to seven generations to our past and simultaneously have actions be done for seven generations into our future. Chief Oren Lyons who is Faith keeper of the Onondaga Nation stated when making decisions it is best not to make decisions for yourself, or even for your family, but to make decisions while keeping in mind how this will impact generations to come (Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health, 2020). A linear, Gregorian calendar of time is not always aligned with a Native American construct of time, where time and events are connected

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